

# PROFESSIONAL READING

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Nijboer, Donald, photography by Dan Patterson.

*Cockpits of the Cold War.* Boston Mills Press and Firefly Books, Ltd., 132 Main St., Erin, Ontario, Canada N0B 1T0. 2003. 192 pp. Ill. \$39.95.

The fourth in a nicely produced series, this book has a unique collection of subject aircraft, especially for American readers. The first three volumes dealt with WW II types, describing aircraft gunner positions and aircraft in the collection of the National Air and Space Museum.

Using a large format that permits proper presentation of historic and current photography, these books feature a brief introductory text describing each aircraft's career. Then the authors have sought out pilots with experience in the specific aircraft and give these notes alongside a full-page color photo of the aircraft's cockpit, complemented by a black-and-white echo photo with numbers over important instruments and a key corresponding to the numbers designating the instruments.

*Cockpits of the Cold War* offers a look at such types, grouped by country, as the Canadian Avro CF-100; American SR-71, F-84, A-1, F-4 and F-8; British Gloster Meteor, Hawker Sea Hawk and De Havilland Sea Vixen; French Dassault Mystere; Swedish Saab J 29 and J 32; and the Russian MiG-15, MiG-21 and Sukhoi Su-7. Although most of these aircraft have seen their share of coverage over the years, their flight characteristics and the design of their individual cockpits have seldom appeared. For readers of this magazine, there are several unusual naval aircraft, such as the F4D and F11F, whose pilot reminiscences offer good reading.

The spread of types is rather uneven, with the lion's share going to the U.S. I would have liked to see a few more French aircraft, especially the Mirage III series. However, I know how hard the task must have been to get responses from distant aviators, whose memories are perhaps softened by time.

The book could have used an editor to catch several typos in designation and facts. The hyphen seems to be a rarity, particularly in American aircraft and squadron designations, F8 and F4 being incorrect. Lieutenant Commander W. T. Amen was the CO of VF-111, not VF-11, when he gained the Navy's first jet kill in Korea, and then-Captain Charles DeBellevue got six kills in Vietnam as a WSO, not five. There's no mention of the third Air Force Vietnam ace, Jeff Feinstein. In the case of the two-seat types, such as the F-4, F-101B, Javelin, Sea Vixen and SR-71, I would have also liked to see photos of both cockpits.

One of my favorite descriptions comes from the section on the Blackburn Buccaneer. The pilot writing about his experiences reports that "the 'Buck' cockpit is known as an ergonomic slum." Sitting on an ejection seat for more than two hours, while trying to work the myriad switches and read the dials, is often a test of pure physical endurance, and it is only recently that cockpit design and aircrew comfort have achieved the importance they now enjoy.

A minor coup involves the MiG-15 description, written by the pilot who delivered a new MiG to the West in September 1953. Has anyone ever wondered whatever happened to North Korean Lieutenant Kim Sok No? Apparently his name is now Kenneth Rowe, and somehow the authors found him and persuaded him to write for this book.

The Soviet section also highlights the MiG-21's amazing record, which includes service with no less than 56 air forces and action in 30 shooting wars. The little delta's phenomenal production tally of 13,500 aircraft is more than two-and-a-half times that of the F-4, the MiG's long-time adversary in Vietnam and the Middle East.

This book is an unusual and extremely interesting presentation that should appeal to both historians and modelers.

Armistead, Edwin Leigh. *AWACS and Hawkeyes: The Complete History of Airborne Early Warning Aircraft.* MBI Publishing Co., Galtier Plaza, Suite 200, 380 Jackson St., St. Paul, MN 55101-3885. 2002. 207 pp. Ill. \$24.95.

Written by a serving lieutenant commander naval flight officer with experience in E-2s and AWACS aircraft, this interesting book is a good reference and overall survey of a seldom described, but vitally important, community. Originally self-published in 1996, this commercial publication has been considerably upgraded to bring the reader into the 21st century.

The book contains a glossary and several useful appendices. The main text starts with the early stages of airborne aerial snooping and control at the end of WW II. Progressing through the Korean War and Cold War operations—which truly drove the development of newer aircraft like the E-2 and AWACS—the author describes combat deployments and the success and failure of this rather secretive group of flight crews.

He gives full coverage to the Air Force's EC-121, whose crews orbited off the dangerous route packages of

the Vietnam War, guiding and protecting the strike groups as they pressed the attacks on Hanoi. The author also describes the EC-121's stellar service "flying the barrier" as an airborne sentry against possible Soviet attack. This important, but thankless, task protected America's shorelines for two decades in appalling weather and with aging aircraft that struggled to function in a constantly evolving arena.

Navy airborne early warning (AEW) began with highly modified TBM Avengers and progressed to the Grumman E-1 and E-2 Hawkeye, both of which saw considerable service in Vietnam. The author describes how the E-2's introductory problems threatened the entire program. But with the Hawkeye's continued service, including a constant upgrading and occasional construction of new aircraft, it's likely to continue its career for some time.

Though the book appeared before the second war with Iraq, a second edition should allow an in-depth description of how the E-2 and AWACS contributed to the coalition victory. There is an adequate selection of photos and a minimum of errors.

AEW crews can finally point to a book about their activities by someone who knows the subject from the inside.

Neufeld, William. *Slingshot Warbirds: World War II U.S. Navy Scout-Observation Airmen*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. 2003. Ill. 239 pp. \$45.

A welcome account of a little known group of intrepid aviators, this book describes the experiences of the crews who flew Curtiss SOCs and Vought OS2Us from cruiser catapults. Often lost in books that focus more on the glamorous carrier-based fighter and attack squadrons, these crews faced many of the same challenges—flak, Zeros, weather—while flying slower, meekly armed aircraft, such as the SOC, the last U.S. Navy biplane to see combat.

The photographs are fairly good, though a few are well known. The text could have benefited from a knowledgeable editor to maintain writing style and to cull odd turns of phrase, misnomers and typos that occasionally change the author's meaning. An example: Marine legend General H. M. Smith's sobriquet was "Howlin' Mad," not "Hollerin Mad."

The author also indulges in presenting somewhat unprofessional opinions that detract from what is ultimately an interesting read and rare historical account. He often makes long analytical comments that detract from his main topic, such as his account of the Marianas Turkey Shoot. But there is excellent research here, and I was surprised to see just how much action these crews experienced, sometimes maneuvering with Japanese Zeros and German Messerschmitts, and even managing to shoot down some of these interceptors.

The details of the 1942 Aleutian campaign, operations in the Pacific and the invasions of Europe add a lot of interesting history. There are even a few descriptions of the role of the Curtiss SC-1, which was supposed to replace the SOC and OS2U very late in the war, but didn't. The activities of VCS-7 and VCS-8, Navy squadrons that respectively flew British Spitfires and American Mustangs during the European invasions, also receive coverage.

Although selling at a rather steep price, this book fills a long-standing void in the overall history of American Naval Aviation.

Polmar, Norman and Dana Bell. *One Hundred Years of World Military Aircraft*. Naval Institute Press, 291 Wood Road, Annapolis, MD 21402. 2003. 456 pp. Ill. \$32.95.

Offering surveys like this where the collection derives strictly from the authors' opinions is always tricky. Readers will invariably question why one aircraft was included at the expense of another type. But, when two experienced, acknowledged authorities combine their talents, the reader can rest assured that their analysis and reasons can stand close scrutiny.

Polmar and Bell quickly remind their audience that this book is a survey of "significant" aircraft, not necessarily the first or the best. And it's hard to argue with their choices. We are led through a century of development and service that is essentially a record of military aviation, beginning with pre-WW I adventures in the Balkans, through WW II, Korea, Vietnam and post-Vietnam operations, including Operations Allied Force, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

The aircraft described sometimes served only briefly, but made an impact. For instance, Grumman's F6F Hellcat flew in first-line U.S. Navy and Marine Corps colors for barely two years, but who can doubt its combat record in the Pacific. Conversely, Chance Vought's F7U Cutlass did not fly much longer, and its record was ultimately dismal. However, it was a radical design that gave insight into using advanced aeronautical designs.

The book is not a record of only famous American designs. It includes examples from Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Germany and the Soviet Union. Besides the expected traditional powered types, the authors present a few gliders.

The photo selection is sparse but adequate, with no more than three pictures, and usually only one, for each entry. I do wish reproduction were better and presented on coated stock as opposed to inserting the photos in the text on the same paper, a common practice these days.

Both authors bring a wealth of knowledge to the text and nuggets abound awaiting the serious researcher or general aviation buff who browses the pages.